

Questions from our consultation

This form sets out the questions we ask in a consultation on restoring and expanding open habitats from woods and forests in England that we launched on 12 March 2009. The consultation ends on 5 June 2009. You can find the consultation at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation or contact Dominic Driver, Forestry Commission for further information (contact details below).

Comments on any aspect of the consultation are welcome, but we are particularly interested in your responses to the questions below. This form is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation.

Your name:	Caroline Harrison MICFor
Your organisation (if any):	Confederation of Forest Industries (UK) Ltd
Date:	3 June 2009

No	Question.
The nature of the change	
1.	Does your aspiration for the scale of the policy fit within our calculated range of 5,600 to 30,000 ha of restoration or expansion of open habitats from woodland or forest over 10 to 15 years? This is 370 to 3,000 ha each year. What level of intervention would you prefer and how is this justified?
<p>The Confederation of Forest Industries (UK) Ltd (ConFor) is a membership organisation established to help build the market for timber, timber products and forest services, create a supportive policy environment for the forest industries and to help our members become more competitive and successful. ConFor has over 900 members in England.</p> <p>ConFor has had considerable general input from members. All have supported a strong anti- line, but we are aware that some members with wildlife conservation high on their agenda may be less sure of or even confused by the evidence presented. Some may be further confused by financial incentives to deforest. Many think that the proposals are perversely absurd.</p> <p>ConFor welcomes the development of any policy that will address the ad hoc deforestation of previous decades however any further permanent removal of England's threatened woodland resource must be minimised (presumption against) and regulated against on the basis that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forest Act 1967 clearly states that The Forestry Commissioners shall be charged with the general duty of promoting the interests of forestry, the development of afforestation and the production and supply of timber and other forest products in Scotland, and in England and Wales. The Commissioners' general duty includes that of promoting the establishment and maintenance in Scotland, and in England and Wales of adequate reserves of growing trees. • The UK Forestry Standard demands protection of the timber and forest resource. Revisions to Forest Carbon Standards and Climate Change Guidelines will provide overarching principles for good forest carbon management and standards for the industry. • Permanent removal of woods or forests to restore or expand open habitat will be measured as deforestation under UK definitions. The UK Government has international commitments to avoid deforestation. England is one of the least wooded countries in 	

No	Question.
	<p>Europe at under 9% coverage (1,1m ha. 2008), compared with the average for European countries of 37%. [See also answers to Q11 and 12]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The forestry and timber industry, FC and many wider stakeholders are wholly committed to woodland expansion. Even a policy for remaining static would not be acceptable. FC England's Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2007 states that 71% of the general public surveyed expected to see more woodland creation. [See also answers to Q11 and 12] • Currently, EWGS discourages planting or re-stocking of conifers; softwood production is expected to peak by 2021, then fall, due to the lack of new planting over the last 20 years; the Government's policy on ancient and native woodland (Keepers of Time) is further reducing productive woodland through its prioritisation to convert coniferous plantation on ancient woodland sites back to native woodland species; these combine to lead to "death by a thousand cuts" of the softwood timber industry. (See Open Habitat Restoration Policy and its impact on the confidence of the timber sector in England (2009)). [See also answers to Q11 and 12] • The private sector in England accounts for 80% of the total woodland area. Creation or restoration of open habitat as result of any policy will not be obligatory but attractive funding packages will seduce private owners to deforest with no long-term commitment to its future. • Woods and forests continue to make a significant contribution to the UK Government's commitments for reducing carbon emissions. Although the maximum reduction as a result of any policy is only 0.1%, at a cost of £5.3m, this is nevertheless highly significant in terms of mitigating and adapting to climate change (as outlined in the evidence paper). [See also answers to Q15 and 16] • The UK's forest carbon stocks are believed to have started falling from about 2005, due to the dramatic reduction in and nature of, new planting. Most woodland creation in the last two decades comprises broadleaves in small areas (average 3ha). [See also answers to Q15 and 16] • Timber business investment plans are based on ten to twenty-year timescales. The expected reduction in economic activity as a result of future reduced timber resources would lead to loss of jobs, skills base and business when motivation within the forestry and timber industry is declining. For many timber users this is the last straw and they feel totally powerless to stop the relentless tide of short-term, unsustainable policies to which they are subjected. [See also answer to Q19] • Net deforestation through land and building developments are unknown. All deforestation, for whatever purposes, should be published in the annual national statistics. Local authority planners indicate that where planting obligations are imposed on developers, these are rarely carried out in full. Deforestation for wind turbines is a major pressure. [See also answers to Q11 and 12] • Public money continues to be spent on awareness raising initiatives to promote the concept of sustainable forest management in light of climate change obligations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many bodies, including non-forestry public bodies, are keen to continue to support and champion this concept. • Misinformation on the deleterious effects of plantation forestry on flora and fauna is often quoted by environmental NGOs. There have been a number of studies that have highlighted the positive value of planted forests for biodiversity. Findings show that a high number of species are found in plantation forestry, particularly lowland Scots pine and Norway spruce plantations, with diverse mammal, songbird, invertebrate, bryophyte and lichen communities. A number of Red Data list species across the majority of species groups have been recorded, with 29 Red Data list species of fungi suggesting that

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	<p>plantations provide a particularly valuable habitat for rare fungi. (Humphrey J, et al, Biodiversity in Planted Forests).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the mid-1990s The Vincent Wildlife Trust has been monitoring pine marten numbers. Extinct throughout much of Britain by the early part of the 20th century, numbers have now risen to some 200 individuals (in England). The surveys and studies which have so far been conducted show that loss of coniferous habitat is a key factor in its lack of recovery outside of Scotland. • Information taken from Wildlife Conservation in managed Woodlands and Forests by Esmond and Jeanette Harris, 1991, suggests that coniferous woods which are under long-term management and include newly planted areas; thicket stage; thinning stage; mature areas; and regeneration coupes support a range of bird species. These include redpoll, siskin (numbers have increased tenfold since 1970s due to conifer plantings), crossbill, firecrest, goshawk (brought back from extinction in England) and the long eared owl. Birds that use restocked sites and forest edges that have increased with conifer regeneration include woodlark, nightjar, hen harrier, black grouse, grass hopper warbler, spotted flycatcher, tree pipit, sedge warbler, reed bunting and barn owl. The black grouse project in north England is encouraging new planting of small groups of trees to increase suitable habitat. <p>Level of intervention:</p> <p>ConFor acknowledges that there are plantations, in exceptional cases, that would be best removed for habitat restoration. Each should be considered on its merits within a framework of relevant parameters. Taking into consideration the woodland removal that has taken place over the last decade, and more, any further area of woodland that is deemed unarguably better to be removed must be minimal. If a threshold is demanded then ConFor must ask for the minimum.</p>
Desired outcomes	
2.	Have we developed a reasonable list of desired outcomes of the policy? Do you wish to suggest any amendments?
Yes. No.	
Measuring the success of the policy	
3.	Have we developed a reasonable set of indicators for evaluation? Do you wish to suggest any amendments to this indicator list?
Yes. No.	
Policy proposals	
Elements present in the policy	
We will treat woodland and open habitats as potentially mutually beneficial	
4.	Do you agree that woodland and open habitats are potentially mutually beneficial? Is promotion of this idea helpful in gaining support for open habitat restoration and expansion from woodland?
ConFor agrees that woodland and open habitats can be mutually beneficial. This is already accepted in restructuring of plantations and woodland creation. ConFor sees no	

No	Question.
	reason why the "idea should be promoted to gain support".
A presumption against removal of 'mature native woodland'	
5.	Do you agree with the principle that there should be a presumption against removal of ancient and 'mature native woodland'?
Yes but the presumption must continue to include and promote no net loss of productive woodland. Indeed, the presumption should be against any deforestation. [See also answer to Q1]	
6.	What do you think of our proposed outline definition of 'mature native woodland'?
Acceptable.	
We will expect practitioners to help local users to participate in development of the initial proposals	
7.	Do you agree that local participation in decision making is helpful? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?
Yes. Evidence of high quality local engagement must be provided with any proposal for deforestation.	
We will promote mechanisms for prioritising woodland removal at a regional level	
8.	Do you agree that prioritisation at a regional level is appropriate for this policy?
Yes. In some larger regions it may be necessary to allow for sub-regional priorities. Any policy that is developed cannot be considered a "catch all" solution. The validity of any proposal for deforestation must be judged on its own strengths and weaknesses through a rigorous assessment procedure, which must take into account local and regional variations.	
Regional mechanisms for prioritising any deforestation must be developed transparently with strong partnership working from the public and private sectors.	
The case for deforestation in order possibly to benefit one or two "priority" species should not generally be sufficient grounds. Deforestation should only be discussed after all other mitigating treatments have been considered. There should be no proactive drive or incentive to recruit private landowners to the cause. [See also answer to Q1]	
We will apply a framework for evaluation to projects	
9.	Do you agree with this framework for evaluation? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?
Full guidance on evaluation must be provided. Although any policy will be aligned with the timescales of ETWF (10-15 years) an annual reporting schedule should be put in place to monitor its effectiveness. The results should be used to inform a three-yearly policy review.	

No	Question.
10.	How much and what kind of support do you think we should give to practitioners to help them evaluate their projects using this framework?
See above.	
To avoid net deforestation in England we will try not to go over a threshold rate of woodland removal due to restoring and expanding open habitats.	
11.	Do you agree with the principle of an England scale threshold rate of woodland removal? What is your preferred mechanism by which such a threshold could be applied to policy?
<p>Yes. Any threshold of deforestation must ensure that there is no net loss of woodland cover in England. As there is apparently no compiled record of woodland removal from land and building developments then it is essential that deforestation is kept to a minimum and certainly below 370ha per year. [See also answers to Q1 and 12] As a priority, further data should be collected and evaluated in the field. It is understood that the new GIS inventory will show much of this information. Indeed, concern has been expressed that this new inventory may be "quite a shock". It would be imprudent to pursue any open habitat policy until such time as that information is available.</p> <p>The law requires that felled trees must be re-stocked, elsewhere if necessary, unless subject to planning permission. ConFor has repeatedly asked for no net loss of productive woodland in England and would prefer an option of compensatory planting on a like-for-like basis. However it is recognised that there are some policy and practical difficulties in achieving this. Grants currently favour broadleaved planting [see also answers to Q1 and Q12]. Other obstacles include the availability of suitable land and the pressures on that land for food production and landowner management objectives i.e. woodfuel or biodiversity. Adjustments must be made to the current grant package to restore balance, with supporting conditions placed in any policy framework.</p>	
12.	Do you consider that the proposed threshold is about right, too high or too low?
<p>Historic and current rates of deforestation outside of Government control (such as illegal felling and windblow) are unknown. Any threshold of future deforestation must be the absolute minimum on the basis that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current new planting rates are falling and at best uncertain and therefore cannot be relied upon as an element of accounting in the threshold equation. • The level of future planting rates will be governed by declining funds, increasing costs and increasing competition for land for food production. • The uneconomic nature (broadleaved) and tiny scale (average 3ha) of recent and current planting, in addition to other policy referred to above, is threatening and destabilising the viability of the forest and timber products industries and sapping their confidence (see business confidence report). New planting should not be considered as offsetting productive forest removal. [See also answers to Q1 and 11] 	
<p>Key variables</p> <p>What is the balance between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce green house gas emissions?</p>	

No	Question.
13.	Is there a way, in the short term, we can better estimate the contribution to biodiversity objectives from different levels of restoration or expansion of open habitats?
	<p>No. The general picture on biodiversity is of recovery in many groups of species but continued decline and vulnerability in specialists. Future impacts on these species are impossible to predict or quantify, for example, development, pollution, competition from invasive species and climate change. There are large gaps in the evidence base on the net benefit from a given amount and type of deforestation for open habitat restoration. Therefore, in these times of economic uncertainty, it is not a wise use of public money to support such vague and uncertain benefits from deforestation over well known, revenue-earning, and myriad public benefits that can be delivered from existing woodlands.</p> <p>Decisions on any further deforestation for open habitats should take into consideration the ability of the woodland to support key species through effective management, such as, thinning, restructuring, or supplementary planting, rather than removal. Deforestation should be the last resort.</p>
14.	Do you agree that management practices to minimise carbon emissions during restoration or expansion of open habitats should be adopted? Do you agree with the outline practices presented? How could we best ensure that such practices are adopted?
	<p>Yes. Yes. However a study undertaken for the FC on forest carbon by Sandy Greig in 2006 highlighted that it is vital that forests are resilient to climate change and that productive capacity is maintained. Maximising wood production in the context of sustainable forest management is desirable. While opportunities should be taken to reduce carbon emissions from forest management, in reality these are very low compared to the potential for carbon gain through improved storage in trees, soils and wood products.</p> <p>Best practice guidance should be produced.</p>
15.	Do you agree that it is appropriate to include impact on long-term average carbon store <i>and</i> loss of potential to substitute timber for higher carbon materials and fuel in the calculations on carbon balance?
	<p>Yes, both issues are essential in any considerations to deforest. Calculations on carbon balance must be a key part of any EIA or proposal for deforestation and in the context of other such proposals.</p> <p>FC England's Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2007 states that 80% of people surveyed believed that trees play an important role in mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration.</p> <p>The evidence paper only considers the loss of potential to reduce carbon emissions from wood as a fuel. The Delivery Plan 2008-2012 for ETWF acknowledges that trees, woods and forests can make a significant and rapid contribution to reducing carbon emissions through product substitution. It also recognises that if the UK is to be one of the leaders internationally in combating climate change then it needs to be exemplary in the way in which it manages its forest resource.</p> <p>UK government has pledged zero emission new housing by 2011.</p> <p>Substituting 1m³ concrete/red brick with timber will save 1 tonne of CO₂. Timber buildings can achieve negative net CO₂ emissions, and the average CO₂ kg/m² emitted by building area for timber (1.4) is vastly lower than concrete (11.1) and steel (5.2). For</p>

No	Question.
	<p>a typical house 20t CO₂ is emitted during construction, whilst if timber use was maximised in the same house only 2.4t CO₂ would be emitted.</p> <p>Some 87,000ha of conifer plantation grows on lowland heathland, targetted for restoration. Typical CO₂ equivalent stock values as measured by yield class for native broadleaves at 80years old is 500t/ha. For productive conifer at less than half that age the figure is £350t/ha.</p> <p>Deforestation for open habitat restoration has the potential to threaten soils. FC has publicly admitted that if the rate of deforestation increases it would have to take steps to ensure the carbon sink is not reduced. Speaking at the ICF's National Conference in 2008, Mats Olsson, Soils Professor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, stated that long-term reductions in CO₂ emissions will be greater from intensively managed forests compared with unmanaged forests.</p>
16.	<p>Where do you think the appropriate balance lies between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce carbon emissions? What processes might help to make this judgement?</p>
	<p>Willis, et al, 2003. The Social and Environmental Benefits of Forestry in Great Britain identified the value of the range of non-timber benefits that forestry in the UK provides at £1 bn/year. Of this the carbon element was approximately 10%, i.e. for every £ invested in a carbon credit £9 in additional public benefit could accrue over time.</p> <p>A significant proportion of open habitat is man-made and managed, however, climate change will do more to change habitat than anything man can achieve through felling. Open heathland is thought to be highly vulnerable to projected climate, for example, it is not resilient to drought and the integrity is damaged further by erosion caused by wind and heavy rainfall.</p>
	<p>Should we be managing open habitats to keep them in 'favourable condition' or should we adopt a more dynamic approach to land management?</p>
17.	<p>Outside SSSIs, do you agree that a more dynamic attitude to land management could deliver equivalent or greater gains for open habitats and species than one where success for all sites is based on assessments of condition as applied to SSSIs?</p>
	<p>Assessment of condition as used in SSSIs is thought by many to be fundamentally flawed. It is based on a static point in history when, in reality, habitats are dynamic.</p> <p>At the entrance to Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, there is a plaque which reads: extinction is an essential part of evolution (it is also a statement in the US Science and Endangered Species Act).</p> <p>Species and habitats change in response to the environment. We cannot know exactly what effects, both directly and indirectly, climate change will have on species, habitats and ecosystems. With Government finances under increasing pressure this is not the time to be "second guessing" Mother Nature.</p> <p>The first response to a call for deforestation should be to look at existing woodland and forest cover to see how it could be improved for biodiversity through less destructive processes. The second response should be to consider planting more woodland to create the desired mosaic of part sustainable commercial plantation, part open space and part shifting mosaic. [See also answers to Q13 and Q20]</p>
18.	<p>If so, how might such an approach be developed? Is there scope for modifying the</p>

No	Question.
	conservation objectives on some SSSIs to incorporate a similar approach? If not, do you consider that the endpoint for all restoration proposals should be judged against favourable condition as defined for SSSI habitats?
	See above.
<p>What level of woodland removal due to restoring or expanding open habitats could avoid a significant negative impact on the timber industry?</p>	
19.	Can you provide any information on the likely links between any reduction in timber production and economic activity in the timber sector?
	<p>Promoting economic growth whilst reducing our carbon footprint is at the top of the Government's agenda. In terms of market forces, we are in a time of increasing global demand for timber and clean, cost-effective fuel sources. Although England is reliant on imported wood-based products, consumers are increasingly making choices on sustainability criteria. The breadth of public benefits from our woodland and forests cannot be delivered solely through public funding. An economically viable forest business sector must exist for this to happen. (Delivery Plan 2008-2012 England's Trees Woods and Forests)</p> <p>The further analysis on timber sector confidence, called for in the evidence paper, has been commissioned and completed, albeit in a short timescale. However, two months into the consultation process this information has only just been released.</p> <p>From a timber grower's viewpoint any policy to deliver deforestation will further demonstrate the perceived lack of support and understanding for the private sector. Significant costs are already absorbed by the sector in implementing the rack of existing policies, Habitats Directive requirements, PAWS restoration, certification requirements and tree safety requirements with no concomitant benefits in woodland quality or outputs.</p> <p>The private sector in England accounts for 80% of the total woodland area, of which up to 70% is un(der) managed. There is a very clear and present danger that the creation and implementation of any further, disobliging, policies will lead to increased disengagement.</p> <p>There is also anecdotal evidence that such policies are a deterrent to school-leavers considering a career in forestry in England.</p> <p>Strong anecdotal evidence suggests that any reduction in productive woodland area will have a negative effect on the timber contracting and primary processing industry when motivation is already declining. [See also answer to Q1]. It is the last straw that breaks the camel's back.</p> <p>Significant work is being undertaken to re-build the skills sector within the industry. This must not be jeopardised.</p> <p>The forecast reduction in softwood availability from 2012 onwards can only be mitigated by maintaining the softwood resource through restocking and new planting. Deforestation is obviously an impediment to that.</p>
<p>Different approaches to applying policy</p>	
20.	Which of the three approaches by which we make decisions about woodland removal is your preferred option? Can you see any alternative types of approach based either on a combination of these approaches or on new ideas?
	The preferred option would be to continue with woodland restructuring to deliver a model

No	Question.
	of sustainable commercial plantation, which includes up to 20% permanent open ground, plus shifting temporary open ground, prior to canopy closure. In addition, in some cases, the same objectives can be met by woodland creation. ConFor appeals for more support for woodland creation of all kinds: £61 million of public money at an intervention rate of 70% could support a significant tree planting programme! [See also answers to Q17 and 18]
The role of compensatory planting	
21.	What is the appropriate role of compensatory planting in this policy?
	See answer to Q11.
Factors to consider when deciding which policy is likely to work best	
22.	Have we developed a reasonable set of questions for informing the decision on which policy is best? Do you wish to suggest any changes to the list of questions?
	Yes. No. ConFor maintains that the baseline information used to assess the best policy option is severely lacking.
Implications for delivery mechanisms	
23.	Have we missed any major implications for delivery mechanisms? Would any be particularly welcome or unwelcome to you?
	No. Any proposal for deforestation must be rigorously assessed against an agreed set of criteria. It would be wholly unacceptable for proposals for open habitat restoration or expansion to be "fast-tracked" through the Environmental Impact Assessment process.
Other comments	
We welcome your input on any other aspect of this consultation.	
At a meeting in 2007 David Milliband the then Secretary of State for Defra said, "woodlands can reduce the use of pesticides and fertiliser and create land that is multi-functional: providing urban flood control, improved biodiversity and wildlife, renewable wood to offset climate change, and attractive and accessible environments for exercise and recreation. This is surely an important priority for the future".	

Please include the "information about you" form with your response.¹

Please send your completed forms to:

[Dominic Driver](#)

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¹ See www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation for a copy.

By 17.00hrs, Friday 5 June 2009.